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### THREE GREAT ARTISTS.

**T**HE Collection of Celebrated Artists,\* under the able direction of M. Eugène Müntz, is one of the most important recent occurrences, a happy endeavor to popularize art and infuse into the public mind a more exact appreciation of it. It is quite fashionable now to pretend to a certain love and knowledge of art, and owing to the general development of criticism, to the constant expositions which offer ever-recurring opportunities for instruction in the matter of training the eye and forming the taste, the number increases day by day of those who delicately appreciate and discriminate in art matters, who feel the true value of form and color, the superior attraction of the beautiful. But how much inexperience still exists even among the best; how much second-hand admiration; how much ignorance, above all, of past ages and of even the most illustrious names! Artistic instruction was

wanting, there were few books of the elementary kind within easy access of the public—books written to instruct as well as please, without a useless display of erudition.

The title chosen is the very best and the work conceived in a spirit to attract and retain general attention. What undertaking could be more important and useful than to lay bare the lives of great artists from the latest and most authentic sources, give as complete a list as possible of their works, study them, analyze their talent, illustrate the text by numerous reproductions of their works? Charles Blanc has done something similar to this in his *History of Painters*; but those noticed by him were required to have held the palette and wielded the brush. In this work all are admitted—painters, sculptors, architects, engravers, artists of every description, ancient as well as modern: whoever is illustrious in the art of drawing.

\*Les Artistes Célèbres—Antiquité, Moyen-Age, Renaissance, Temps Modernes—Biographies et Notices Critiques publiées sous la

direction de Eugène Müntz—Donatello par M. Eugène Müntz, Rembrandt par M. Émile Michel.

What a collection ; what a vast museum, where are found united, side by side, all the great artists who have charmed humanity and peopled the world with their dreams : where Jean Goujon comes to join Phidias, Delacroix to unite himself with Rubens, and Prudhon with Corregio ! The volumes being entirely separate and independent of each other, one can easily devote himself to the kind of study toward which his taste and inclination lead him. This is an advantage and a convenience, but it is to be hoped that many will desire the subtle and delicate charm of the whole collection ; for one only half loves the beautiful when it is admired up to a certain point, within a certain limit—when one confines one's self to a single epoch or a particular school, refusing to leave it in order to taste the charms of a variety of forms and an inexhaustible wealth of dreams, which are the very joy of art.

The most important thing in the appearance of a collection of this kind is to give the impetus, the first turn of the wheel ; to impress one's particular method and character on the work ; to strongly mark it from the beginning with those qualities of order, precision, and conscientious and solid instruction which impart the whole value to it and make it appreciated by savants as well as pleasing to the multitude.

This rôle was quite natural to M. Müntz, who undertook the enterprise, and to acceptably fill it had only to be himself. The volume devoted to Donatello is excellent in every respect. A better commencement would be impossible, as the subject chosen is not only new and interesting, but treated with marked ability. May M. Müntz's fellow-

workers always remain faithful to this standard ! Donatello is little known in France. Even at the Louvre there was no important work of his until recently, when there appeared a head of Saint John, from the Goupil collection, with its strange, refined, and profoundly enigmatical look.

The work of M. Müntz amounts to something more than a good book : it is a good act, which will be justly valued by those so unfortunate as not to have visited Florence. The name of Donatello is exceptionally important in the history of art ; it is from him that the grandest modern sculpture dates. He was endowed in the highest degree with the gift of imparting life. Some natures are more attracted and delightfully touched by the delicate grace, the charming mysticism, of a Mino or a Luca della Robbia ; but before Donatello it is impossible not to bow the head and pronounce the name of genius. He is of a race of giants, of those who manipulate marble with power and impart to it not only breath and laughter, but tears, action, life itself. It is not his least title to honor that he opened the way for Michel-Angelo and contributed, perhaps, toward forming the greatest sculptor who has existed from ancient to modern times. The comparison which M. Müntz draws between "Saint John the Evangelist" of Donatello and the famous "Moses" would seem to prove this.

Rembrandt is much more celebrated, more universally known, than Donatello ; even the uninitiated know his name, and the most inexperienced admire his works with confidence without always comprehending them.

Our century has done much for the glory of Rembrandt during the last fif-

teen or twenty years: how many important works have been dedicated to him! Thoré first gave the signal in enthusiastically chanting his praises in all keys. The archives of Holland, the libraries were searched, and little by little his life, known hitherto only through the frivolous gossip and fictitious tales of Houbraken, was disentangled from the obscurity and mystery surrounding it. After the valuable discoveries of Elsevier and of Scheltema, M. Vorms wrote his excellent book, full of interesting matter, which still remains the surest and fullest source of information on matters appertaining to the great master.

Fromentin then followed with an essay on Rembrandt in his "Old Masters," defining the very essence of his talent with a delicacy, penetration, and subtle analysis calculated to discourage all succeeding him. In our day, Charles Blanc and M. Dutuit have raised their monument to the engraver; M. Bode has added increased, exact, and altogether new details to that which we already know concerning the painter. It would seem as if the subject must be exhausted, that nothing remains to be said but to feebly repeat what has already been repeated before. Nevertheless, after this long list of predecessors, we welcome the book of M. Émile Michel on the same subject with interest and read it with pleasure and profit. In the first place, he refrains from already accepted judgments from the opinions of others, and upon occasions even controverts that of the higher authorities; in a word, he judges for himself; he handles the works under discussion freely, with the perfect liberty of the critic, with an ability and firm appreciation which bespeak the

artist who understands his work, and is for that reason so much the more competent to pronounce an opinion. Had the book of M. Michel no other use than to collect in a most complete manner all anterior works, and present rapidly and in true French style the last and absolutely certain results attained by science under Rembrandt, not to speak of the recent discoveries of Messrs. Bredius and Roever, published only last year in a Holland review, it would merit serious attention. These new discoveries are very important in contributing a fuller knowledge of the last years of the great master, including his contests with his creditors and his home life. They prove that Hendrickie, the servant of Rembrandt who held such a place in his affections after the death of Saskia, was a good woman after all, guarding the interests of Titus much more than her own. The association and intimacy which she established between them to protect the interests and insure the tranquillity of her master is quite peculiar. She could not have been a vulgar person if the woman's portrait in the square salon of the Louvre be really hers.

An important remark made cursorily by M. Michel, and one worthy of remembrance, for it includes all that can be said on Rembrandt, is that the particular characteristic of his talent was to extract the essence of everything, the heart of every secret; to give depth instead of an expanse of surface. The truth of this observation is clearly exemplified by a study of his life and works. It is this which distinguishes him from his great contemporary Rubens, with whom one is always tempted to compare him, and who, in

certain respects, is his rival in the eyes of posterity. Rubens rather confines himself to that which appeals to the senses and renders his eloquent moments by sweeping lines and rejoicingly harmonious colors, by an all-pervading fire and ardor and an effulgent life. Rembrandt, grave, concentrated, dreamy, aims at the immaterial, tears aside the veil to scrutinize and probe to their depths the mysteries of the soul. His creations are often homely, awkward, vulgar, but how full of thought! No one has ever been able to infuse into a body such a penetrating and sustaining soul: it is this quality which has given him the name of a pure spiritualist. He is spiritual in his peculiar manner of employing light. Many of his predecessors resorted to these bright lights and deep shades, but who before ever obtained such striking results? Rembrandt employs light not only as a picturesque effect, but as a moral expression; that which no lines can render, which is conceived only by the mind and felt only by the heart, is expressed by light; it plays the principal part in his pictures and breathes forth their meaning. To consider only one of his most perfect pictures at the Louvre, "The Carpenter's Family," what is it that expresses such peace, union, and happiness in this Nazarene family which makes it the ideal of all others? A bright,

electric, joyous light, which emanates from the body of the child, inundates the mother's breast, forms a center, an inner sun, in comparison with which the outer sun seems pale and cold. What is it in the "Two Philosophers" that renders the abstraction of a meditating and dreamy spirit? Is it not the deep light, the calm and tranquil atmosphere which bathes the two small faces, envelops them with its mystery, and makes almost perceptible the working of their minds? But it is in the "Disciples of Emmaus," above all, that Rembrandt has extracted the most marvelous expression from the judicious use of light and shade and portrayed that admirable head of Christ, which, once seen, can never be forgotten, true type of the resurrected and transfigured dead, a divine phantom, from which the light flows in undulating waves, as from the very source itself, the whole flooded with a sort of vague and irradiating phosphorescence. Seeking farther, we have only to go to the Museum of Dresden, where the disciples are alone, Christ having just disappeared, leaving in his place a dazzling light. It is in this picture that Rembrandt has attained the highest degree of spiritualization, the very zenith of his power. These are things that can be only indicated, however, in a short article.

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